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(Travel Letter following a tour around South America by
W. C. Pearce, L.H.D., Associate General Secretary,
World's Sunday School Association)

September 3, 1923.

My dear Friend:

In the providence of God I have been permitted to visit our sister continent - South America. Earnestly have I sought to see for you and other Sunday-school friends; prayerfully have I sought to rightly interpret what I saw and to discover what our World's Sunday School Association could do to help. Now I am trying to write you about those things which would be of special interest to you as a friend of Christ and the Sunday-school. I am sure you will understand that I can only write a partial account.

My visit took me to Panama, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. These include by far the largest part of the South American population. What is done for the Sunday-school work of the other countries will be largely determined by the work in those I visited. A few general observations may be of interest as they form a sort of background for the work we have to do.

1. The natural resources have scarcely been tapped. The clearing of the Canal Zone and introduction of gardening, fruit culture, etc., reveals untold possibilities for Panama and all similar countries. We passed one mining camp in Peru and they pointed out one mountain of copper which will keep the company busy fifty years. And that is only a very small portion of this one company's holdings. In Chile and Argentina we passed single farms that, if divided into farms of 300 acres each and four people put on each farm, would provide homes for 15,000 people. And these were much smaller than others. Brazil will no doubt provide homes for 100,000,000 people within the next century.

2. The growth of religious liberty is steady and sure. The leaven of evangelical Christian teaching is gradually breaking the crust of tradition. Just before we reached Peru there had been a sort of revolution. It came about in this way. The Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church, with the evident support of the government, announced that on a certain day he would consecrate to the heart of Jesus the whole population of Peru. Immediately there was a popular protest led by students of the University and the workingmen. Arrangements for a procession and public meeting were made. As these men marched up the streets of Lima, they were halted and fired upon. Amongst those killed were a student and a workman. The government soldiers tried to get possession of the bodies of these men, give them a quick and secret burial and prevent any demonstration in connection with their funeral. But they failed and all night long the students and workmen, more than a hundred strong inside of the University building, guarded the bodies of their murdered friends. After midnight the army came and demanded the bodies. The student leader told the army

officials that they could not have them, that if they broke into the University, it would be a violation of the national constitution, and that they, the students and workmen, would burn the University and all of them die with it. At 2 a.m. the President of the Republic came and called off the army. The next day a great public funeral was held with a funeral procession of approximately 10,000 people. The order for the consecration service was withdrawn and the Archbishop tock an early ship for Rome. Why I could not learn.

The significant fact is that even in backward Peru, the attempt to trespass upon religious freedom utterly failed. And the protest came from students and workmen led by the President of the Students Federation, a young man twenty-six years old, who had been a student in the British Mission School under the leadership of Dr. Mackay. It was here he caught his vision of Christ that inspires him now. It was this Christ in his heart that led him as a student leader to extend the work of night classes which explains why the workmen follow him now. When I was there he was in hiding but it was my privilege to see and talk with him. His face shone with the light and love that was in his soul. I congratulated him upon his ministry in behalf of religious liberty and his fine spirit, for in his funeral oration at the graves of his comrades and in all of his conversations, he breathes only love for his enemies. This is only one instance which illustrates the struggle going on and the part our mission schools have in the progress being made.

3. Progress is also being made in temperance reform. A striking instance is the leadership of President Alassandri of Chile. He himself is a total abstainer and an avowed advocate of prohibition. During the recent Pan-American conference at Santiago, he gave a dinner to the delegates from the United States and served no strong drinks. Judge of my indignation to learn that afterwards a dinner was given by Mr. Fletcher, leader of the U. S. delegation, and drinks were served. President Alassandri was present and turned down his glass. President Alassandri was out when I called but I left my official card with a personal word of congratulation upon his splendid stand in favor of the moral issues of our day.

4. Considerable progress is being made in behalf of education. Increasingly large plans are being made to provide public schools. We saw school buildings that would do credit to any community or nation. The requirements for the professions are being continually raised. Opportunities for agricultural and mechanical education are also being multiplied. Indeed it would be quite easy to write of these things in such a way as to leave the impression that splendid and ample provision is being made for the intellectual training of South American youth. The fact is that this provision is in spots. It is most difficult for South American leaders, bound by tradition and training to a policy of education of the leaders ONLY, to become enthusiastic in behalf of UNIVERSAL education. And so long as from 60 to 80% of the people are illiterate, it makes religious education more difficult. I could not help but recall that the Robert Raikes Sunday-school was organized to teach the youth to read that they might be able to read the Bible and that the early Sunday-school in the United States taught reading. Then I wondered if this had any suggestion for the Sunday-school movement of South America.

These facts are mentioned because they all have a very direct bearing upon our whole Sunday-school work. It is impossible to mention all of the fine Sunday-school workers I met or to describe the Sunday-schools visited, but I will seek to analyze the situation and illustrate with the facts observed:

1. As usual we found the Sunday-school to be popular with the people. Every feature of the modern Sunday-school we found in operation. The organization of mission Sunday-schools is being vigorously pushed. In Montevideo we visited a mission church that had established several mission Sunday-schools, one of them meeting in one room of the home of a member of the church and another in a rented one room adobe residence. At Juiz-de-Fora, Brazil, we visited several mission Sunday-schools, one of them meeting under the shade of bamboo branches which had been placed in the earth so that the tops formed an overhead canopy. There is almost unlimited opportunity for this type of work.

2. Everywhere there is an expressed need for the preparation of indigenous lesson courses and the development of an adequate literature in the language and atmosphere of these countries. Many suggestions were made as to what was needed. Much is now being done but all felt the need of a more thorough study of this phase of their work. I gave much study as to what is being done, what needs to be done and as to the wisest method of doing it. The competent leadership, both native and missionary, which I found, is our best hope that it can be done. They will welcome and will need the help of our leaders in curricula building, editing and publishing.

3. The most vital need is leadership and heroic efforts are being made to meet it. The mission high schools and colleges are working steadily to this end. Their fine educational leadership gives to them entree to the best families. I met a young lady of this type in Rio. She had been converted in a mission school and was giving special attention to story telling. In the fall she comes to the states for her college training and it is the hope of her friends that she will become a leader in the story work for children. Here we long to mention the names of all these schools and their fine work of real leadership training. Not being able to, we mention none. Then the churches are organizing training classes in the individual Sunday-schools. Institutes are also being conducted. Indeed my heart was made to continually rejoice to find this type of work all along the line.

4. But perhaps best of all is the high type of leadership both native and missionary, working in each country. Not enough of them, but devoted and capable and far-visioned men. By unanimous vote of the conferences in Peru and Chile, steps were taken to create national committees to be in contact with the World's Sunday School Association and to supervise the development of national Sunday-school organizations. Similar action was taken at Montevideo. Argentina and Brazil already had national organizations. The high grade work being done by these organizations may be illustrated by the State Conventions I attended at Rosario, Argentina and Juiz-de-Fora, Brazil. Rev. George P. Howard, General Secretary of Argentina and Uruguay, and Rev. H. S. Harris, General Secretary of Brazil, are doing a marvelous piece of work. Their statesmanship gives them the confidence of the Christian leaders and their choice Christian spirit has won the love of all. Rev. H. C. Stuntz, who is filling Mr. Howard's place while the latter is on furlough, made all my appointments on the West Coast, Argentina and Uruguay. In the few years he has been there, he has made a very great contribution to literature development and leadership training. Long live Howard, Harris, Stuntz and their associates in both office and field.

All the nations visited expressed a desire for a World's Sunday School Convention, to be held in South America at some future date, and I should not be surprised if representatives at Glasgow seek it for 1928. The splendid steamship service we now have from Europe and North America

direct to South America makes this much more practicable than it would have been a few years ago.

The trip has been strenuous, for much of travel and work was crowded into less than four months. Three centers in Peru, five centers in Chile, five centers in Argentina, one in Uruguay and five in Brazil kept me pretty busy. But so many doors for service were opened so wide and the Father gave daily strength, that my heart is full of gratitude. But I also feel very keenly our Sunday-school responsibility. More and better literature for teachers and pupils must be prepared. A larger investment is needed in behalf of leadership training and in many of the fields, a movement for the organization of mission schools should be vigorously pushed. To do this will require a larger staff of men giving their whole time to the work. Will you not pray that new friends may be found and the old friends renew and enlarge their gifts. If you are not now contributing, will you not become one? The work not only needs it but the consciousness of your comradeship in financial support would increase our courage.

Will you pray for Drs. Landes and Price, and myself, that our faith may increase and our zeal be daily renewed.

Faithfully yours,

(Signed) W. C. PEARCE.